

a young child's success later in life. Some of these kids and parents don't have other options without Head Start.

Without this budget agreement, there would have been an additional \$20 billion cut to our defense programs hitting next month. Those defense cuts are going to disproportionately hurt my home State of Hawaii. Without this budget agreement, 25,000 Federal civilian workers in Hawaii could be furloughed or laid off.

Hawaii can't afford that. I voted for this budget to prevent those cuts.

The bipartisan budget agreement finally provides relief from the sequester and a path forward to get our economy on the right track. Most importantly, the budget protects Social Security and Medicare benefits.

Although this budget is the right choice for many reasons, we know it is not perfect. I do believe we need to work together to improve parts of it.

I find it unacceptable and inexplicable that the House of Representatives left town for the holidays without extending long-term unemployment benefits, and I know we are working on making it a priority as soon as we return in January.

In addition, Senator SHAHEEN has introduced legislation—which I am proud to support and cosponsor—to protect military retirees from the cost-of-living pay adjustment. The cost-of-living pay adjustment won't take effect until January of 2015, which means that we have time to fix this issue, but we must fix this issue.

This legislation that I am cosponsoring with Senator SHAHEEN will fully pay for the change by closing a loophole that some companies are using to avoid paying U.S. taxes with offshore tax havens. This is a commonsense fix that I believe we can get bipartisan support for. We need a long-term budget, but not at the expense of our military retirees.

We can replace the money raised by closing this tax loophole that some companies are abusing. We have time to fix this issue, and we have to do so before 2015. But now is the time to move forward, to protect jobs, and to give our country some economic certainty.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

VA EXPIRING AUTHORITIES EXTENSION ACT

Mr. LEVIN. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of H.R. 1402, which was received from the House and is at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1402) to amend title 38, United States Code, to extend certain expiring provisions of law, and further purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. LEVIN. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read three times and

passed and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate.

The bill (H.R. 1402) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

Mr. LEVIN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEVIN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. LEVIN. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each and, further, that the time count postcloture.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LEVIN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I rise today to address the dire national security situation and the responsibility of this body to pass a national defense authorization bill this year.

Congress has passed this legislation for each of the last 51 years, always with broad bipartisan support. This year should be no different. Our service men and women are deployed around the globe in defense of our Nation. They put themselves in harm's way to further the American principles of freedom and democracy, yet we have failed to provide these men and women and our senior military leaders the fiscal certainty and legal authorities they need to complete their vital missions.

Instead, we have a Senate majority intent on fundamentally altering the way the Senate conducts business by pushing through bills without a full and open process. This is not the way the Senate was designed to function.

This year's National Defense Authorization Act was reported out of the Senate Armed Services Committee on June 20 of this year. Since that time it has been delayed time and again by the Senate majority leader as our Defense leaders struggle to implement our national security strategy. General Dempsey recently transmitted to congressional leadership an itemized list of 26 authorities that will expire at the end of this year or shortly thereafter.

We are not talking about legislating ancillary programs or nonessential functions, we are talking about military special pay and bonuses for deployed servicemembers, funds to transition security responsibilities to our Afghan partners, and critical counterinsurgency programs in the Middle East, as well as funding for our intelligence community.

While I support the underlying bill, I am deeply disappointed with the process that got us to this point and thus why I did not vote to invoke cloture. Frankly, I had several amendments I would like to have added to this bill addressing such issues as a technical correction giving Reservists and National Guardsmen proper credit toward retirement for time spent deployed, and an important land transfer of Camp Merrill in Georgia between the Army and the U.S. Forest Service.

I have seen many changes during my years in the Senate, but among those is a disturbing trend regarding the NDAA. We seem to be operating on the premise of fewer, faster, and later. By fewer, I mean fewer amendments. All Senators deserve the opportunity to amend this important piece of legislation. The 20-year average is 140 amendments per year. Last year we were only able to pass 106 amendments. This year we debated one.

As we have seen time and time again, the majority uses the amendment tree to shut down debate and move the bill quicker through the Senate. My colleagues and I have filed over 500 amendments to this year's NDAA. Through hard work and bipartisan support, the two Armed Services Committee staffs have striven to accommodate the concerns of the Senate. But even so, there are pressing issues that require full and deliberative debate in the Senate. These include military sexual assault, counterterrorism and detention policy, and sanctions against those regimes that would do America harm, including Iran.

By faster, I mean the bill spends less time on the Senate floor. The 20-year average is over 9 days, with a maximum of 19 days for the fiscal year 2008 bill. The 1 day we spent on this bill in November is insufficient time to debate the critical security issues confronting our Nation.

The Senate majority has gone to great lengths to keep the bill off the floor. When they could no longer avoid it, they have compressed the timeline for consideration or recommitted it to the Armed Services Committee. This is unprecedented and it is totally unacceptable.

By later, I mean a lack of urgency to take up the bill after committee action. Looking back over the last 40 years, the Senate has gone from passing the NDAA consistently before August to later and later in the year. Last year, it was December. This year we are running up against the end of the year.

I am deeply disappointed at the recent turn of events in the Senate.